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SUBJECT: GUIDANCE: MIDDLE EAST BRIEFING, JULY 22

¶1. (U) This is an action message. USUN is authorized to draw from the points in para 2 below during the Middle East Briefing scheduled for July 22.

¶2. (U) Begin points:

-- I thank Under-Secretary Pascoe for today's briefing on the situation in the Middle East. I would like to make four points with regard to the Israeli-Palestinian peace process and then turn to the situation in Lebanon.

-- First, achieving a peaceful, two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a key priority. We remain committed to achieving a peace agreement before the end of the year. President Bush and Secretary Rice's intense personal engagement on this issue demonstrates their commitment to fulfilling the promise of Annapolis.

-- While the ongoing bilateral talks remain confidential at the parties' request, they are serious, substantive negotiations that are addressing the core issues.

-- The Quartet is playing a key role in supporting the parties' efforts through coordinated, international engagement. When it meets again in September at the General Assembly, the Quartet will consider the timing and agenda of a meeting in Moscow to lend support to the process launched in Annapolis, after further consultations with the parties. We welcome our European partners' strong support for this process, as reiterated at the recent Union of the Mediterranean summit, and look forward to constructive cooperation through the Quartet to support the parties in their dialogue.

-- Separately, Israel and Syria are continuing their indirect peace talks under the auspices of Turkey. We hope these talks will be a forum to raise the breadth of Syria's activities of concern, including its support for terrorist groups and its facilitation of foreign fighters entering Iraq. The United States will continue to focus on the Israeli-Palestinian track.

-- Second, Palestinian capacity building is key to the success of this process. The Palestinian Authority is in dire straits financially, with a projected budget deficit of over \$500 million in 2008. The U.S. has delivered on much of our \$555 million pledge made in Paris last December, including \$150 million in direct budgetary assistance. We urge others, particularly governments in the region, to increase their commitments.

-- We are working hard to support the parties' efforts to improve security for Palestinians and Israelis, and improve humanitarian conditions for the Palestinians. U.S.-trained Palestinian police have deployed to Jenin in coordination with Israeli authorities, and are working to uphold law and order and crack down on terrorism. We applaud their efforts in difficult circumstances to restore order and confiscate illicit weapons.

-- Third, we remain committed to a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza. We will not abandon the people of Gaza.

-- We condemn the efforts by Hamas and other groups to usurp violently the lawful authority of the Palestinian government in Gaza. Hamas can be part of a peaceful process only by accepting the principles outlined by the Quartet: renunciation of violence and terror, recognition of Israel, and acceptance of previous agreements between the parties, including the Roadmap.

-- Finally, we reiterate our deep concern at continuing Israeli settlement activity, and call on Israel to freeze settlement activity, and dismantle outposts erected since March 2001, consistent with its Roadmap obligations. Settlement activity is having a negative effect on the atmosphere for negotiations and has the potential to harm them going forward.

-- Turning to Lebanon, the United States views full implementation of resolutions 1559 and 1701 and the Doha Agreement as essential to safeguard Lebanon's independence and security, and notes the Secretary-General's recent report on the implementation of resolution 1701.

-- We welcome the recent formation of a National Unity Government and have stated our determination to continue to work with Lebanese authorities to strengthen its state institutions.

-- We also welcome the recent announcement in Paris that Syria and Lebanon have agreed to exchange diplomatic missions. Full normalization of relations must include the delineation of the Lebanese-Syrian border, and we call on the Secretary-General to engage with Syria and Lebanon to encourage immediate progress on this issue.

-- We strongly support the Lebanese Armed Forces and Internal Security Forces in their efforts to restore calm. Events in Lebanon in early May demonstrated yet again the serious threat posed by armed groups outside the control of the State. As provided in resolution 1701 there must be no weapons in Lebanon other than those of the state. The international community must stand with Lebanon's legitimate government in insisting on the authority of the state and on the illegitimacy of militias, such as Hizballah, that undermine that authority in defiance of this Council.

-- We remain concerned also at persistent reports of breaches of the arms embargo along the Lebanon-Syria border, and note the Secretary-General's observation that full implementation of the arms embargo is an indispensable provision of resolution 1701 that must be observed immediately, comprehensively and without exception. Regional parties, such as Iran and Syria, maintaining ties with Hizballah and other illegal militias in Lebanon are obliged to respect and abide fully by the arms embargo on Lebanon.

-- We welcome the Secretary General's intention to strengthen the diplomatic process aimed at dealing with the issue of the Sheba'a Farms, and urge him to engage directly with Israel, Lebanon and Syria on this issue. We also strongly support the work of UNIIC and look forward to the establishment of a Special Tribunal for Lebanon.

End points.
RICE